



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
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Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

Monday, March 9, 2009

1:30 PM in Room 1B of the LOB

Good morning/afternoon, Chairpersons and members of the Education Committee. My name is Glenn Cassis the Executive Director of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. Created by the Legislature in 1997, the Commission represents a voice for the African-American community and accomplishes its mission primarily through research, policy analysis, advocacy and outreach.

The African-American Affairs Commission believes that the future success of Connecticut will be in the hands and minds of the students enrolled in the State's secondary public educational system. The students that attend public middle and high schools throughout Connecticut are the human and intellectual capital that policy makers must invest. Understanding that students in Connecticut have remained on a plateau while other students in bordering states, the nation and the world have moved ahead academically, the State Department of Education has taken steps to improve the academic performance of students.

The African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) strongly supports **Raised Bill 944 – An Act Concerning A Plan For Academic and Personal Success for Every Middle and High School Student**. Having been an active member of the State Department of Education Ad Hoc Committee for Secondary School Reform, the AAAC has studied this issue. The evidence shows that there are an ever increasing number of students in Connecticut graduating high school not prepared to meet the needs of the current work force or academic requirements of post secondary education. High school graduates do not have the 21st Century skills demanded by business and industry to be competitive. A growing number of high school graduates are ill equipped to withstand the rigors of post-secondary education and result in not graduating. More students in Connecticut are graduating high school but their diplomas are not providing them with the academic skill sets needed to achieve their highest potential.

Although the effect of this bill will reach all school districts, the impact will have its greatest impact on underachieving districts. The urban school districts where more than seventy percent of all students of color in Connecticut attend public schools, have students who graduate high school with very little to show. The diplomas awarded to these students do not compare to the degrees awarded to their fellow students from suburban schools. The recommendations set forth by this bill will require schools to develop a personal success plan for students beginning in middle school. This will require students (with the support of their parents and teachers) to prepare a plan that will include twenty-five credits to graduate high school, core courses in algebra, geometry and biology, humanities, technology, a successful capstone experience and career and life skills.

It is essential that the plan provide alternatives students who may have difficulty meeting these requirements. As proposed alternative means must be in place for students to complete graduation requirements. Provisions for academic support, use of community colleges when districts lack facilities for students, additional time to graduate, dual enrollment at higher education institutions and instructional support from neighboring districts are some recommendations that must be included in the plan.

The AAAC urges the General Assembly to insure that lower performing districts and districts where components of this plan have not been implemented to be afforded the opportunity to be part of the planning process. The African-American Affairs Commission believes it is vital for all students of color to achieve their maximum potential. This bill will insure that Connecticut becomes the premier state for educational achievement.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to address you.

Glenn A. Cassis
Executive Director